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Swede Hollow, Then Up on the Street



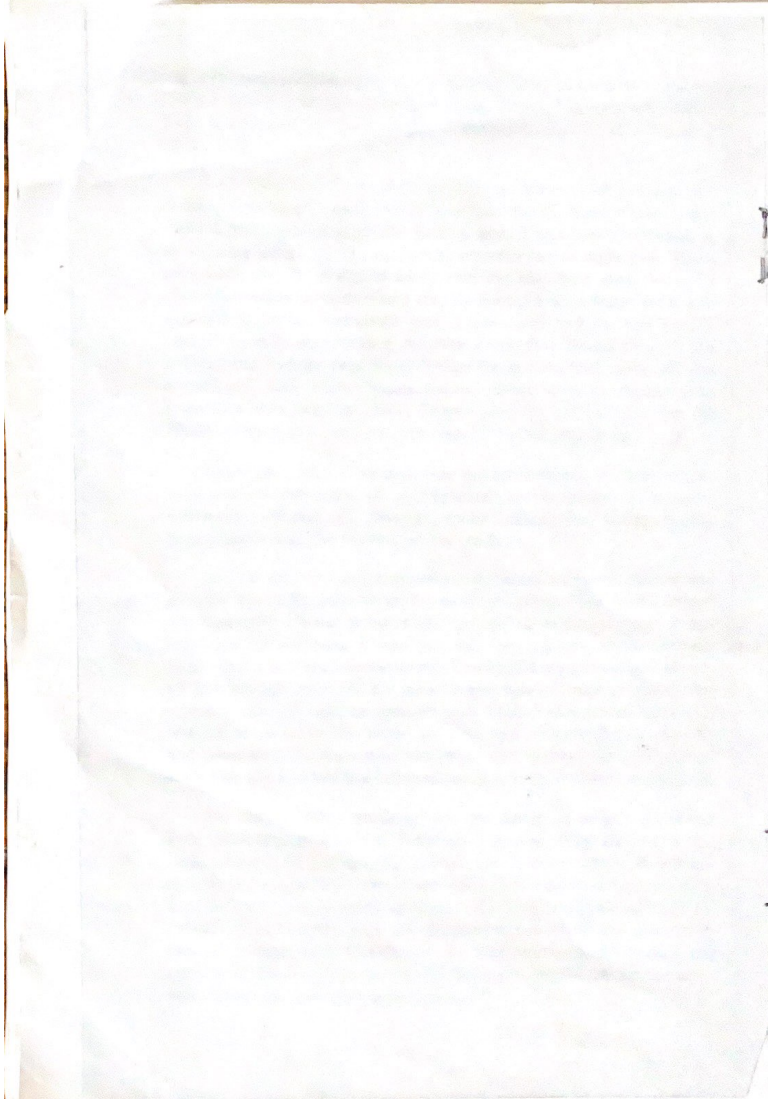
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A DOCUMENTARY

by Gentile Yarusso

SEPTEMBER 1968





Swede Hollow, Then . . . "Up on the Street"



I RECALL WITH NOSTALGIA the little things that filled my heart as a child with joy, the picking of the first dandelions, the wild asparagus, the mushrooms in early fall, the watching of my mother and neighbors baking large loaves of bread in outside ovens, the making of wine in the fall of the year. I recall the Italians singing in the homes in my old neighborhood, the cold winter evenings, the children all sitting around the old self-feeder stove doing our school work, the cat, contented, asleep under the stove. Those were the days.

It was a period when thousands of Italian immigrants got off the train at the depot in St. Paul, Minnesota. They all had tags on their lapels, and on each tag was written Joseph Yarusso, No. 2 Swede Hollow, St. Paul, Minnesota. Joseph Yarusso was my grandfather. He was there at the depot on many occasions to greet these friends and relatives, who had just come from the Old Country. He had been one of the first immigrants to settle in Swede Hollow. It was therefore his obligation to see to it that these people should have a place to stay and a place to settle for a while. By pinching and scrimping, in a year or two, when they had saved enough money, they, too, would move to better living quarters — Up on the Street. This was Railroad Island, just left of the Hollow, and surrounded by railroad tracks. This move would be a sign of prosperity, of accomplishment. Here there were sidewalks, running water, inside toilets, electric lights, and in many houses, furnaces, the modern conveniences of America.

I have for many years been urged by relatives and friends to write about Swede Hollow and Railroad Island. "Do something," they all said, "before it is too late. The houses are being torn down to make way for a highway. Swede Hollow begins to look like a forest." So recently I went back, and revisited on foot the old neighborhood, my boyhood haunts; and what I found was not only boyhood haunts but boyhood memories. I left Seventh Avenue and walked toward the steps that would take me to the Hollow. They were no longer there. The entrance to them was boarded up. I crawled under the fencing and walked down a little path to a clearing. Not a soul was in sight; not a home could be seen. The homes had all been torn down. The beautiful little paths and walkways were indistinguishable, grown

over with weeds, grass, trees, and shrubbery. I can remember when the Hollow was full of two and three-room houses. No two were alike. They had been built by the earlier Swedish immigrants who preceded the Italians.

Each home had then a little garden; a little shed attached to the home had an outside oven in which to bake bread. Some houses had a water hand-pump close to the kitchen sink. There was no plumbing, no running water, no electric lights; kerosene lamps were used. However, near the homes and flowing from the high hills were dozens of clean pure-water streams where the residents got their water for drinking and for other household uses. Each home had its own outside "bifee" on stilts overhanging the little creek that flowed through the hollow, and had its own plank bridge for crossing the creek. All the houses had little rustic fences around them, covered usually with grapevines that failed to grow. Grapes needed plenty of sun, and the Hollow was heavily forested with trees and other vegetation.

But what I remember most was the contentment of these people, their laughter and songs, the conversations, the language, the romance and melody of that life. Everyone spoke Italian, even the small children playing near the streams or the creek.

Several times a week a peddler with fruits and vegetables would visit the homes. In order to get to the Hollow from "Up on the Street" a person driving a car or horse and wagon had to pass through a tunnel under a train track. It was here that the boys would raid the peddler's wagon of their favorite fruits. The tunnel wasn't wide; it afforded just enough room for the horse and wagon to pass through. The driver couldn't get off; he couldn't walk back on his wagon because it was full of his wares. He swore, shouted, and hollered. By the time he had gone through the tunnel the boys were scampering up the Hollow's hills like Indians, leaving peelings of oranges and bananas behind.

We children often wondered why our people chose this enchanted little settlement in which to make their homes. Why did they come here, why not somewhere else? As we got older we knew; they chose this place because here they were with their own countrymen, with familiar faces, family noises, gestures, and facial expressions. They selected this enchanted landscape because it resembled the place they had left behind them. They loved the hills, the trees, the stream, the security of friends and relatives. Here everyone spoke the same language. "Here was love and understanding."

I can remember how we kids from "Up on the Street" used to go down to Swede Hollow on Halloween after all the lights in the little homes were out, how we sneaked cautiously down the hills and at a given signal, how we would all rush for the outside "bifees", and down into the creek they would go. Soon all the lights in the homes would be on, doors unlocked, and one could hear the angry voices of the people, "They have come, the rascals. I thought that they wouldn't come this year. It is late; I thought that they were all in bed already." But by the time these old-timers got dressed and out of their homes, we had scampered up the hill to safer ground, the safety of our old neighborhood.

We boys from the neighborhood can never forget how the Hollow looked in winter. The life there completely changed. Snow covered the little houses, the fences and the familiar paths and walkways. No one cared to stir; even the family pets seemed to go into hibernation. One could see the snow-covered roof tops and the little paths leading to the outside bifees. One would see the smoke slowly curling up and around from the little rustic chimneys. In the evening little rays of light would glow from the small windows. Most of the winter, the settlement in the hollow was sad and dreary; and I know because I delivered newspapers to these homes for seven years. Many times I was invited into the homes in the early morning hours to warm up a bit. The children's winter stockings would be hanging in front of the open oven to dry out. Behind the stove were the woolen mittens, made from old woolen socks, drying for use the next day. On the floor in front of the oven would be shoes, the fronts curled up just a little because the wet shoes had been in front of the oven too long. Many times I was invited to eat toast with the family and drink coffee. The toast was browned by placing the piece of bread directly on the stovetops that were usually red hot. I remember when almost all the men had mustaches and how in the winter the snow and ice and frost caked and froze on them. Many times I saw my dad come into the house after working outside the whole day in below-zero weather and bend over the kitchen stove to let the heat melt the frost and ice from his brown mustache.

Nor can I ever forget seeing the many Italian bachelors with white flour sacks slung over their backs coming from work up the hill on Bradley Street to Seventh Street. They had just purchased large loaves of bread and perhaps a pizza or two from Michael Yarusso's bakery. Michael was a brother of my grandfather, and he was the first immi-

grant baker in the community. He made bread as no other person could; no one could duplicate it. He even told others the secret of his formula, yet his bread was always the best. He could have sold it to outsiders, outside of the district — he couldn't — he had all he could do to satisfy the wants of his own people. He kneaded the dough by hand, then formed it into perfectly round loaves. He always made the sign of the cross and said some prayers just before he began to make and mix it.

Across the tracks, west of Michael's bakery was "Enright's Old Fashion Flour Mill." On the side of the mill, up high, was a huge sign. It read: "Enright says — When all o' the wheat is in all o' the bread, all o' the world will be much better fed." Michael Yaruso had no printed signs, no cards for advertising. His bread was good enough to build thousands of healthy bodies and to maintain them in the hard work that the first immigrants performed.

How we children looked forward to the Christmas and New Year holidays. We helped our mother with the cooking preparations. Days before Christmas our folks baked fresh bread, dozens of different kinds of cookies, salted Lubinos, and we fried platter after platter of Buccala and other fish. There was pop for the children and always wine for the adults. We visited our neighbors and sang Christmas carols in English and Italian. We played carols on the old phonograph. We had the run of the house. Before the holidays the front room was "out of bounds, restricted area." The only time, save during the holidays, that we used this room was when we had company, a special guest or event. The kitchen was used to wash in, to dress in, to study in, and discussing the day's happenings and the making up of the weekly budget. We did everything in the kitchen except to sleep in it. How I miss seeing the old well-stocked wood box behind the old stove! We never ran out of cord wood. Behind the stove, too, in a little pouch, was always a "La Turk" tobacco drying. It was strong. We used it often in a closet in place of moth balls.

So I walked on remembering other days. On Fred Street, there was Lincoln School. The happy hours we children had spent there! I can remember how we had to march down the steep steps every day, Miss O'Toole playing the piano and we kids trying to keep in step with the music. We certainly got good training from wonderful teachers, especially from Miss Thuet. We were scared of Miss Thuet, the school principal, yet we loved her. She did more for us Italians

than any other public official. This school is to be torn down very soon, and a new one built north of the railroad tracks outside of Railroad Island.

I crossed Burr Street and walked down De Soto Street. The old Chrispus Attucks Home for the Aged was torn down. It had been a home for retired Negroes. Yes, we all remember old Bob, the blind man who lived there. Everybody who entered the sixth grade had to write a story about him. He was colored and a friend of all the children.

Upon reaching Sals Hill I stopped to rest. Here I found a large new building, a private Racquet Club. Just down below the hill had been our playground, the "Old Lot." It was only about two hundred and twenty-five feet square, but we children used to ski down the hill and over on to it. We never had money to buy skis. We made them from old wine barrel staves. Sure, we knew people laughed; we didn't care; we had lots of fun. In the winter, too, we flooded our own rink. We'd all go home and return with our mothers' wash tubs. We would line up next to the hydrant, two boys to a tub. The hydrant would be opened, each tub filled and dumped on to the rink, which was approximately eight feet away. It took time to flood our rink, but it was worth it. In the summer we had ball games on that field every evening. Our backstop was old bed springs. We children never received the cooperation of the city recreation department. We had one of the lowest rates of delinquency in the city of St. Paul. They thought we didn't need their cooperation.

Just west of the old playground is Brunson Street. We call it Brunson Speedway. It is a hill two blocks long. During the month of August, year in, year out, clotheslines nearby seemed to disappear. Suddenly coaster wagons, buggies, and children's carriages would be found without wheels. The reason was that the annual Columbian Club little squirts chug derby was about to be held. There was no roar of mighty engines, nor was there a smell of smoke or burning fuel. But there was tension and courage on the part of the small boys who would race down the hill in their homemade chugs, steering with the clotheslines they had borrowed. Competition was fierce; all were determined to win. Some of them risked their lives piloting their little cars down the high starting ramp and down the two-block hill. The race area was always decorated and a neighborhood band played at the ceremonies before the start. The parish priest would usually lead the one hundred

boys up the course for all the parents, relatives, and friends to see and admire their favorites. Afterwards a party was usually held for all to enjoy.

Across the street from this area was Fatty Joe's old ice house. Fatty Joe had worked for many years on the railroad as a section hand. In 1937 he decided to go into business for himself. He bought a little ice house and sold ice to the people in the neighborhood and to various taverns. Boys hung around the place and assisted Joe in his deliveries. It was a little cooler sitting on summer days on the ice-loading platform. So it seemed anyhow. Joe, however, used to say that his place of business was a "rendezvous for mischief." Oh, how many times the boys would hide Joe's little ice wagon when he went into a home to make a delivery. Whenever one heard the constant honking of horns and one saw the congestion of traffic on any neighborhood street one knew that Old Joe was out in the middle of the street with his ice wagon. He felt that he had just as much right on the street as any other vehicle. At all hours of the day he was a familiar sight pushing his wagon down the avenue. He always had "one for the road" after making a delivery to one of the neighborhood taverns. Joe will always be remembered for being punctual. When one ordered ice in the morning, one got the ice, but three hours later. He gave credit freely; anyone could give him a sob story, and old Joe would make the delivery. Joe became very ill during the last war and spent considerable time in the hospital. He told me many times how much he missed the boys who were away in the various services of our country. I saw him for the last time one day talking to his old friend, Mr. Crea, who lived just across the street from Joe's ice house. He had just returned from the hospital and was walking with a cane. With him were the Orsello brothers, life-long friends. Joe had once boarded with the Orsello family. Joe kept looking toward his old ice house. It was closed; the only window in front was broken; the door was hanging by one hinge. The weeds were high, and broken chairs were left on the old ice-loading platform. Old Joe passed away shortly after that and many of his friends gave him one of the best and most memorable funerals in the district. No one ever opened the ice business at that location again. The boys in the neighborhood had lost a friend as well as a rendezvous for mischief.

Just west of the ice house was 464 Hopkins Street, my old home. I stopped to linger a while. I had to; I had lived there many years. The fence around the garden plot had been torn down. The place

where once the fruit and vegetables grew was full of old cars and a couple of barrels of rubbish. The residents now didn't care for gardens. The outside shed was gone, the shed with the oven where my mother and her friends baked such wonderful loaves of bread. I can remember those days as if they were only yesterday. We kids would carry the wood from the woodshed to the oven-shed and place it in the brick oven. Then my mother would put a match to it, close the door and let the fire burn out. By this time the oven was properly heated. We would then rake out the embers, swab the oven with a piece of sacking tied to a long pole, and dipped into a pail of cold water; in this way the oven was cleaned. The bread dough was then placed on a "peel", a wooden flat shovel, and put into the oven. It was an art to get the dough off the peel and onto the exact spot in the oven. The door was then closed. The heat of the oven was, I imagine, 400 to 500 degrees Fahrenheit. In about an hour the bread was done. One could smell it a block away. Yes, we made pizza, too, good pizza, really cooked.

In the fall of the year walking through this community, one would smell the aroma of canning. Hundreds of quarts of tomatoes were put up by everyone. We canned also green tomatoes in vinegar, green beans, mushrooms, pickles, rhubarb. We ate a great deal of "polenta" about this time of year, too, because we had fresh cheese and fresh tomato sauce to pour over it.

I looked just south of my old home, an area known as Villano's garden. The Villano family had lived here and had had one of the largest gardens in the neighborhood. There isn't a boy in the community who didn't sometime or other steal a cucumber, tomato, or carrot from this garden. But woe be to him if he was caught! The Villano children were all big and strong, and one didn't dare put up a fight. The Villanos would simply hand you a hoe. "Go to it," they would say, "start hoeing." After about twenty minutes Mrs. Villano would come out of the house with a pan or bag filled with fresh cucumbers, tomatoes, green beans, or carrots. "Here" she would say, "take this home to your mother — be a good boy now." That's the kind of woman Mrs. Villano was. Her boys were all good football players and in later years coached many of our junior and senior teams. Now on the site of the old garden stood a huge factory, the Kenny Boiler Company.

Now I was a stranger in the neighborhood. As I walked on up the street, a few people looked at me, but said nothing. How everything had changed! We children had always been awakened in the early

morning hours by the crowing of Villano's roosters, and the whistles from the large industrial plants in the vicinity. And neighbor would be greeting neighbor, as they started a new day: "Buon giorn'. Buon giorn'. Come stai Piason."

I think one of the most popular men at the time was the man who put together the first wood-sawing machine. When the saw rig was first used, we boys danced with joy. Railroad ties were so readily available that almost everyone in the district had had sufficient wood for the winter months. Every boy had learned to saw wood at an early age, and was required to saw so many ties every day. Now all we had to do was chop the wood, throw it into the cellar, and then pile it up neatly. For this we usually received an extra quarter to spend at the next church festival.

Our little St. Ambrose Church held and sponsored at least six religious festivals on the church grounds every summer. Who will ever forget these events? On these Sundays we would dress in our Sunday best, all the girls in their white dresses, carrying flowers, the boys in their blue serge suits with knicker pants, each boy with a white ribbon tied around his left sleeve. There would be a big parade. A religious statue was carried by six men. On it were ribbons to which money was pinned by people who stood along the route. Leading the parade was Father Pioletti accompanied by six to eight altar boys. Good old Verdies band made up entirely of musicians from the neighborhood all dressed in blue and gold uniforms, played throughout the march. Up and down the streets of the neighborhood we would march, never looking to the side or back. If one did, he got a slap on the head by one of the parade officials. After the parade came the benediction in the small church. If we did not attend the parade or if we left before the benediction, it was just too bad when we got home. We had to account for every moment we had spent at the festival. While we kids ate our fill of hot dogs, ice cream, pop corn, candy bars till our folds really splurged, I believe our parents really enjoyed these festivals more than we, because there they had a chance to meet old friends and relatives. Friendships were renewed, new acquaintances made. It was a place where one got the latest news of people still in the old country. Verdies Band continued to play far into the night, sitting high on the old band stand and being eaten by mosquitoes.

In church we boys always thought that the good Father was looking us over in the hope of trying to catch some of the boys talking. I think he was seeing who was missing from mass. When he did speak,

he spoke as no other priest could talk to a group of children. He always started the same way: "Mia bambini, how nice you all look today! How nice and clean with your hair combed so neat, immaculate! Try to stay that way all day. Now you promise. Good, good! Now you know how hard your poor mothers work to keep you looking so nice. Have some consideration for them; they work so hard." His sermons are missed, especially when he spoke in Italian. We have so few older Italians now at the new St. Ambrose Church, that Italian is never spoken by the new priest, Father Pingatore.

It was at the church festivals that I saw Father Pioletti pull the ears of some of the biggest neighborhood bullies. Father was small but he handled himself well. He would walk among the people in the church grounds always giving advice and encouragement to those who needed assistance. To the children he could be seen handing out nickels. If one refused to accept money, which most children would do, Father would feel hurt, and he would always say, "Take the money. It's for the little things you did for me at the church recently." He had a heart of gold.

Our folks really enjoyed life, especially, it seemed sometimes, after a hard day's work. I can remember the smiles on the faces of my parents. I can remember seeing them working about the house, in the gardens. They worked with thoroughness, with visible pleasure as if work were not man's punishment. Their evident delight and eagerness were contagious; almost everyone was willing to lend a hand. They talked about their daily tasks. How they loved, too, to tell of their trip across the ocean to America. It was a journey they never forgot. And we children never tired of hearing of this experience. The trip had actually terrified our people. It took most of them over thirty days by boat. When the weather was bad, they were told that they had to stay down in the hold. This frightened them. Water was unfit to drink, and the food was terrible. Many of the immigrants brought their own food along. But what they talked about mostly was of their hunger, not for food, but the hunger that brought them here, the hunger for opportunity, for the right to vote, for a chance for education, for the right to be recognized. Here, in America, they would say, was everything, food in abundance, plentiful land, opportunities for everyone who cared, who tried, but most of all "Here was freedom." In the evenings, especially on a hot night, one would see entire families sitting in a backyard patio covered with grapevines. Men would each be sipping

a glass of wine and talking, the women knitting and crocheting. No bug bomb was ever needed to kill or to keep the mosquitoes away. The Italian cigars the men smoked would keep them away for hours.

The Italians made their own wine. Every fall we children would go down to the cellar to watch my dad and his friends make the wine. In the early days they had no wine presses and therefore they made the wine in the traditional way of the old country. Grapes would be placed in a large vat and my dad would soon be seen stamping them with his feet. How my dad's feet seemed to sink into the grapes, smashing them into a pulp! I remember how the juice squirted between his toes, warm and sticky like blood. My dad seemed so happy. A deep satisfaction seemed to come over him as he trod the tender fruit, squelching under his feet. Mr. Frascione, our neighbor, would take a glass, open the little spigot and let some of the grape juice run into it. "It tastes good," he would say; "the wine will be good." In a couple of days we children would go down to the cellar, put our heads near to the barrel, and listen. We could hear the boiling; the scum of the impurities would start rising to the top. Always on top of the scum we could see tiny little scum flies. The air in the cellar smelled of the fumes of alcohol. Soon the rubbish would be skimmed off the top of the barrel along with the stalks and grape skins left over from the wine treading. There was a regular ceremony connected with wine making. A candle was lit and prayers were said; then my folks would make the sign of the cross and more prayers were said. Just before the wine was ready to be drunk at the opening of the barrel, another ceremony was held. It was after many months of patiently waiting that the barrel was at last opened and the wine was ready to be drunk. As best I can remember, the wine was always good.

Prohibition did nothing to us in the Hollow or in the Island. Every one made his own wine. Our fathers took wine with their meals. It was drunk with enjoyment and in moderation. Our mothers drank very little, although one sometimes saw a mother dip a piece of fresh baked bread into a glass of red wine. Refusing a glass of wine when offered by our people was an insult; it was a sign of disloyalty. We children very seldom drank wine, yes, we would sip it perhaps, then hand it back to our folks. I have tried to recreate the atmosphere of wine making because it dramatizes the little things in the life of a small boy.

Yet the past held other excitements for a boy. One of these was food! I don't care what street or alley I walked up or down, the fra-

grance of food was everywhere. I could tell just what every family was having for supper or dinner by merely walking near the home. In our neighborhood, wherever I might go, I always found warmth and hospitality; no matter in whose home we were, there was always a welcome.



AS I WALKED ON viewing our old haunts, I soon stood before the old settlement house. The place is closed now; it is some kind of a manufacturing plant. When I grew up I was a staff member at that Center and know how much it helped to build better citizens. I remember many happy days with the children there, the parties, the basketball games, craft classes, and dances. I directed many activities, but enjoyed dramatics the most. I worked with children, who are the best actors in the world. I never had trouble getting people to play parts. Musicians — we had them by the dozen. There were three or four in every family.

I remember how as boys almost every evening during the summertime, usually after a ball game at the Old Lot, we would get our instruments and meet at the top of Sals Hill. We would play our instruments until away into the night. It was our jam session. We could see our parents sitting in their yards and enjoying every minute of it. We were close to the house; we weren't in trouble. We were supervised from a distance. And we kids got so we were pretty good at determining what conversation was going on between two Italians, at a distance, though we wouldn't be able to hear a thing. Oh, the changing expressions, the moods of those taking part in a discussion! We could read joy, sorrow, hope, anger, relief, boredom, despair, love, just as easily as if the words were written on a large sign or blackboard. Their faces were transparent. We children got so we could recognize, too, the regional differences in the people who lived in our city. Some Italians in other sections of the town behaved differently from those in our section both in their work and in their play. They were more reserved.

As I walked on past the Center, I noticed more changes: the Vander Bies Ice Cream Company was no longer there, the St. Paul Bottling Company was no longer in operation. Beyond the old pop factory, from the big hill overlooking Swede Hollow I noted that the railroad track which skirted the little valley was still there. It was starting to get dark, a mist was forming over the still Hollow. Years

ago about this time of night all hell seemed to break loose here. We needed no alarm clock to tell us it was nine o'clock, time to be getting home, for at this time every evening, a freight train would come up the track skirting the Hollow. It wasn't an ordinary freight train. Three large coal-burning locomotives assisted by a pusher in the back would come thundering up from the Burlington yards some two miles south of the Hollow. The freight train was on its way to Duluth, Minnesota. We children would sit high up on the bank above and watch it go by.



The giant locomotives would come puffing up the track, their headlights glowing like the eyes of a serpent, winding around the curves of the Hollow. What noise, what thunder as the engines passed us! Cinders and sparks fell all around us, on our heads, on our shoulders. Windows in the homes would rattle. Mothers would call for their children. Some of the smaller kids would become frightened and start to cry. Fathers would be cursing the whole spectacle in general. After the freight train was out of sight, we would slowly walk back home. Stillness would settle over the Hollow. Occasionally one might hear the barking of a dog.

I walked on past the St. Paul Bottling Company buildings and stopped on the corner of the old church grounds. I had to take another look. How cold the church was in the winter. How we children would be packed like sardines in the pews. We didn't mind; we kept warm that way. The only time we were uncomfortable was when in the spring our pockets were full of marbles, agates, crockery, and peewees. We were sitting so close together that the marbles made us mighty uncomfortable. Once in a while a few marbles would drop to the floor. Then Father Pioletti would stare in our direction. I walked on down by Woodward Street past the Cocchiarella house toward what had been the site of Madia's house. I recalled the many kite contests we used to have here. We all made our own kites, we made our paste, too, out of flour and water. "Take it easy" my mother would say, "flour cost \$2.98 a sack." How many times we played against the Bedford Street gang in softball, marbles, Can-can, and in stilt contests. Even the DeKateur Gang didn't stand a chance on the street in front of Joe Mikia's house. How many times our play was interrupted by the popcorn wagons that passed by Joe's house on the way to the ice cream company. The Greek and Jewish owners of these little wagons would always shout: "No braka the windows, boys," "Stoppa the play." We stopped our play and stood by as they passed. Whoever bought anything? We never had a nickel.

Talking about horses and wagons brings back memories of a man we all knew and loved, "Mike, the Sheeney Man." We didn't call him that to be disrespectful. Our older brothers and sisters called him that; we did too. Mike bought our pop bottles, rags, and iron. It was Mike who made it possible for us kids to earn enough to pay the admission price to the New Frances and Old Unique shows that were located on Seventh and Rosabell this side of Sibley Street. I can see him now slowly coming down Fourteenth Street, then turning toward the St. Paul Wreckage Company, past Rocco Costello's old house, down to Pettit Street, up Payne to Bedford, to Beaumont, to DeSoto, then north to Minnehaha, to Payne Avenue and up out of the neighborhood. He came at the same time every morning, punctual as a clock, made the same route, tipped his hat to all the women he knew. He watered his horse many times at our house. He got off the wagon, pail in hand, turned on the outside faucet, and filled his pail. Sometimes he would talk to my dad in the shed that housed the outside oven, or he would drink a glass or two of red wine with him.

I again looked up toward the Old Lot playgrounds. I seemed to hear a roar, a roar by the many spectators who watched the ball games. I recalled the roar that went up when Nick Garboon Savino struck out Ernie Ferrozio, Swanson, and Joe Pariana to win the playoff game against Morelle's Supermarket Team. On the very next night Ernie Costello struck out Joe Madia, Al Capacosa, and Harold Schickel to win the championship for the Gentiles team.

I slowly retraced my steps past Damiani's grocery store and up Seventh Street toward the steps that led to the Hollow. The two houses near the Hollow on the high bank overlooking the train tracks had been torn down. One was the house where Mike Pizzella lived until he moved out of the Hollow and Up on the Street. Mike played the accordion. Little Mike Pizzella played at every wedding, baptism, and party that was ever held by the old folks years ago. How they loved to dance the Tarantella to his music. It was at some of these parties, though, in this atmosphere of fun and laughter that I witnessed the crying of older men and women. I saw the tears and almost felt the ache in their hearts. They were thinking of the relatives and friends left behind in the old country. They knew that these people were still eating pasta, beans, polenta, escalotta, nuts, and spaghetti, with never a change in their diet. Each one saw how the communities of the north were prospering while his little village that he had left behind was lapsing deeper into depression.

I passed the boarded fence, the entrance to the Hollow, the place where I had started the story. I took one last look. We people had deserted the Hollow; we had been blind to her beauty and were deaf to the music of her rambling creek. As the creek rambles along, now under dark, damp tunnel walls built some years ago, it, too, must feel the quietness, the stillness, the last of Swede Hollow. Our treasured haunt is but a memory.

Our old fashioned people preserved the old traditions. How many times they must have looked up from their work in their gardens in the Hollow and stared at the landscape to the west; for this was the limit of their village. Sometimes, "up there on the street" was a promise; it overwhelmed them. Yes, they worked hard, saved, planned, and eventually met the challenge.

Our parents tried. They made every effort to give us everything they possibly could. Some of them didn't learn the English language as well as they should, perhaps, but they did take part in community events. They were poor people, preoccupied with earning a living; some took more time than others to become Americanized. Many of the first immigrants who came to Swede Hollow and to other districts of the city were in their fifties. Their attitudes were fixed. They did everything one way. They had to provide for their families. They were busy with their everyday jobs. They had to work in their gardens in the evenings, and in the winter months had to attend naturalization classes at the settlement house or at Lincoln School.

Yes, our folks were poor. They were the first immigrants to arrive in large numbers after the close of the great land settlement. They faced many difficulties. Instead of getting one hundred and sixty acres of land, as some early immigrants received, they got a filthy one-room tenement upon their arrival in New York. They were hedged-in by slums, factories, and warehouses. No wonder they left New York in a short time and came to St. Paul. They wanted more room, more room for living, more room for walking; and by hard work, they realized this dream. Our little Italian church helped. It was like a magnet, encouraging the newcomers to work and live in sight of God and church.

When one considers the past history of our grandfathers and grandmothers who lived in insecurity and in a dangerous and unruly,

unpredictable society in the old country, one understands how they learned to find refuge behind the walls of their homes among members of their families.

Not once was the loyalty of our mothers and fathers questioned. Hundreds and hundreds of our boys served our country in the last war and many are serving now in the conflict in Vietnam. I shall never forget seeing Father Pioletti visiting the many homes in the neighborhood consoling, advising parents, who had, in some cases, five and six sons in the service at one time. I remember seeing our folks attending early morning mass at St. Ambrose, sad, weary, lovingly praying for their children's return from the war.

Every child who came from the Hollow or Railroad Island is proud to call himself an American. He loves this country. He has fought for it, yes, on the soil of his grandparents back in the Second World War, sometimes fighting in the very town his parents came from. There are very few who are ashamed to say or let it be known that his or her folks came from the Hollow or Railroad Island. I hope that my children will never forget their heritage. In writing this story, I felt that I must speak for the old immigrants; I owed it to them, to the environment in which I was born.

From these immigrants have come a new breed, a new generation. Many of the sons and daughters of these people have children now who are attorneys, successful business men and women, teachers, school principals, coaches, politicians, State Representatives and Senators. A few are in professional sports. Some are social workers and police officers. It is to these that I direct my statements, to this generation. I had to satisfy myself, to tell how I personally felt. I had to speak for those who have passed away. They, the immigrants, would want me to tell the world that they had courage in their hearts, that here in America they had earned a certain dignity. They had laughter and sadness in their lives, too. The potentialities of some of our people, to be sure, were never fully realized. But they would want me to say that they were never too proud to work at any job; that they had sacrificed so that their children could climb another rung up the social ladder.

Many changes have taken place. We younger people have taken advantage of the opportunities available. We believed as our folks did that someday things would be better, if not for us, for our children. I know that to some people — but to very few — we were nothing but

foreigners, wops, dagos. It was to these people that we had to prove that we were not intruders, not undesirables. It took some years, but we finally proved to these people that by competence in the classroom, on the playgrounds, at our work and in our play, we had earned the respect and attention we deserved. We are thankful, we children who came from Swede Hollow and Railroad Island, that we had the patience, sympathy, and understanding of our teachers and social workers.

Like many other parents, I realize that times have changed. Our children are beginning to live their own lives. They are more independent; their tastes are different, their desires, their ambitions. They want to live apart from authoritarian parents, old fashioned ideas, old rites. I know that behind some closed doors in some families a tenacious struggle is taking place, a struggle to try to preserve the substance of old ways. There is a struggle going on in the hearts of our young people. Let's face it; our children are going modern. This is as it should be. We will all miss the old customs. How many children, how many parents today in time of stress, in time of danger, show affection, love of mother and God by saying "Mamma mia" or "Madonna mia." Every decision of our elders was made with the help of God, not only with the heart but with words and emotion.

If monuments to the past of our communities are to be erected, one should be to the Christ Child Society, the staff workers and to Mrs. Countryman (Mrs. O'Halloran), the teachers from Lincoln School, the McManus family from the St. Paul Bottling Company and for Mr. Dunn from the former Vander Bie's Ice Cream Company. A special tribute should be paid to the Morelli family for all the financial contributions to all clubs, groups, and organizations, the Yarusso family, owners of the Payne Ave. Tavern, and to Mr. William Gentile for his contributions these many years. No monuments, no plaques, or testimonials can ever repay for the leadership and love for my people shown by the director of the settlement house, Miss Eleanor Dowling. The biggest monument, however, should be erected to the poor immigrants who left the train at the Union Depot and followed my grandfather down the path along the railroad track, down to Swede Hollow then, finally — "Up on the Street."